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Community members' interference and conduct of University distance learning examinations in South Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This research work was aimed at determining the degree of community members' interference in the conduct of university distance learning examination in South Eastern Nigeria. It was also aimed at finding out the factors responsible for the community members' interference, the ways by which interference is effected, the consequences and the strategies to improve the conduct of the examination. A survey descriptive research design was adopted. Information obtained was analyzed by using the Z-test statistical technique. Findings include community members reluctance to provide their infrastructural facilities at cheap rate; use of some spaces for religious worships when examinations are taking place; harassment and bribing of invigilators or examiners; conspiracy with some community members to throw paper balls containing answers into halls, etc. The study recommends preventive measures for minimizing interference during the examinations.

Keywords: assessment; community; distance learning; examinations; Nigeria

Introduction

The value of examinations in any idealized picture of society cannot be overemphasized. This is because examinations, according to Aggarwal (2008), are good servants as they help to evaluate the achievements of students toward having a better society. They are great touchstones for measuring the amount of knowledge required or the degree of skill achieved by the students for use in the development of Nigerian society. It is quite disheartening that, as stated by Okonkwo (2011), the use of Marple TA software to conduct end of semester e-examination, which is aimed at enhancing the National Open University of Nigeria examination efficiency, still has its own challenges.

This is why it is now acknowledged all over the world that, for quality education to be assured through the examination system, continued efforts of the government and the community are required. It further explains why some experts, like Motala (2001), asserted that quality education takes place in environments that are healthy, safe, protective, gender sensitive and provide adequate resources and facilities. Eze (2008), on his own part and on the same issue, reported that when schools and families work together to support learning and the examination system, it benefits everybody in double fold. It is unfortunate that in most parts of Africa and particularly Nigeria, the culture, religion and some individual differences tend to isolate school activities from the communities. The schools' activities and the communities' seem to be carried out in most areas along separate courses of developments. There exists in such a situation a rare point of collaboration, except when the students are met in the classroom for teaching and examination. The effect of this ugly development is that students in various programmes continue to be increasingly alienated from their communities. The students will also be insufficiently prepared to play any useful role in the Nigerian society.

The educational venture in Nigeria is no longer a conventional issue alone. It has become a venture in which the spirit of the public to benefit is awakened by introducing university distance

learning programmes. The recognition of community members as owners of the school programmes and thus their responsibility in protecting them has become a valuable asset to education and its professional development. Ordinary people in the community must be properly informed of the important role they will have to play and must surely play in the development of a school programme. Community members must be made to understand that school programmes and examinations given to their wards are their precious entitlement.

They are therefore required to accept them as their inheritances, which must be patronized and maintained at all cost. The benefit of the school programme and examinations conducted is such that when they are positively harnessed, accepted and organized, they could serve as catalysts for an effective teaching and learning. The school programme and examinations conducted must identify properly with the communities. They are to recognize the philosophy of life in each community, the life and attributes of the community members, the needs of the community members and perform other roles beneficial to all members of the communities. This was why Adeniyi, in Anukam and Anukam (2006) stated that school programmes and the examinations must be tailored toward qualitatively educating the members of the communities. The school programmes and the examination apart from culture are to be organized in a way they will make the community known within and to the outside world. They are to conserve the culture of the people of a particular language and promote adult literacy programmes. This will be accomplished when the school programmes, examinations and facilities provided are allowed to be in good conditions.

As a reciprocal gesture, the community members in turn will be expected to generate or raise funds for the maintenance and development of the school programmes and examinations. The community members are to protect and ensure conduct of the school programmes' examinations in conducive environments. They assist examinations to stand in the midst of competition in using the halls for all sorts of purposes. Rather than witnessing positive school programme examinations and community relations, community members interfere with the conduct of university distance learning examinations in various forms. Community members' interference involves the activities arising from the examinations venue of the school programme, which is a cog in the wheel of its success. When this is happening, the University governing council members appear not to be interested or are not capable of doing something to salvage the situation.

This explains why Bantock (1968, cited in Aggarwal, 2008) observed that learner central examination seems to be an ideal approach in the context of internal examination of the educational institutions, but how to achieve the objective is a hard nut to crack because of community interference and other reasons. Many studies have placed a strong emphasis on the gains of a positive school-community relationship, whereas not many studies seem to have been carried out on the negative impact of community interference on the conduct of school programmes' examinations.

This study has therefore set out to determine the various ways and degree in which community interference affects the conduct of university distance learning examination in Nigeria. It went out further to examine the consequences of this interference and to suggest strategies to overcome such problems. University distance learning is referred to as a non-conventional system that offers opportunities to more learners seeking higher education and training. Adewale, Ajadi and Inegbedion (2011) state that, as reflected in the National Policy on Education, it is one of the maximum efforts that will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education, to be given access to it.

Literature review

The conduct of university distance learning examination in the communities where the programme is permitted to exist is handled by organizations known as Institutes, Centres or consultancy services

units. According to Parson (1960, cited in Ogunu, 2000) social system theory as an organization refers to a social system that is in structural and functional relationship with the larger social system, which is the host society. Most often, all social systems according to sociologists are confronted by four basic system problems. Parson outlined them as adaptation, goal-attainment, integration and pattern maintenance or latency. It implies that a school is a social system and the relationship between the programmes like examinations and the host community must be directed by the social system theory. Moore (1965, cited in Jayieoba, 1994) did observe that it is not realistic to assume that all social system elements have the same degree of interdependence in different environments. What a social system theory does is to give an insight into components' parts of an organization, relationship among the parts or their function and ways the parts adapt to the influences of environment. Jayieoba and Atanda (2003) have been of the opinion that the old idea entailing that the school and its activities should first be regarded as an academic island existing apart from the community can no longer be sustained. Their work also recognized that the community and the school exert the greatest and permanent influence on the total development of the learner. Thus, the school community relationship must involve the members of the community surrounding the school and its activities such as examinations. This is very crucial since the community has remained as the primary agent of socialization on the part of learner.

Before the advent of school programmes, ancestors were using various methods to screen candidates for admission into some profession/occupations for training. Screening tests, entrance/grading tests, continuous assessment, terminal examination and external checks were the methods commonly adopted. Through the establishment of University of Ibadan by Oxford University, many students were admitted based on the conduct of an entrance admission/examination. This was used to regulate the number of candidates to be admitted and resulted into 2 or 3 students out of the aspirant/prospective students getting admission.

With the establishment of other Universities in Nigeria, whether public, federal, state or private universities, the Joint Admission and Matriculation (JAMB) board examination emerged, conducted by University experts. In terms of semester examinations for the students, the National Universities Commission recommended that the examinations should be conducted by the individual universities and not by JAMB. As written examinations made their appearance in Cambridge and Oxford Universities in the 1770's, so did written examination make its appearance in distance learning universities in Nigeria as of 1948. Today, examinations that are conducted by Universities offering distance-learning programmes are done in over 400 locations and communities. Many criticisms are being directed at the ways the examinations are conducted. As examination had disturbed the examiners from the day it was constituted, so it has disturbed the community members. Mandernach (2003) is of the view that assessment is the means of guiding both instructors and students by providing insight on student learning and the effectiveness of institutional activities. Okonkwo (2011) referred to assessment as that which focuses on the individual learner, the learning community, the institution or the educational system as a whole.

For this reason the community members are seriously interfering with the conduct of the examination in various ways. In fact, the defect of examination has contributed to the negative attitude of community members toward distance learning examinations being conducted in Nigeria. The defects encompass developing frustration in the examinees, causing large incidence of failure, certificate inflation and disappearance of the genuine process of education. As a result of these defects or challenges, Okonkwo and Ikpe (2008) called for re-engineering of examination and evaluation process in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) via "On Demand Examination Initiative."

It is in an attempt to overcome the defects of examination that community members who are concerned resolve to engage themselves in some frivolous interference moves. The interference

activities include the adverse behaviour of some very low performing students who want to pass the university distance education examination at all costs. In this situation, safety for other high performing students and facilitators conducting the examinations are not guaranteed for the examination goals to be achieved successfully. This could explain why Parret and Budge (2009) observed that too many educators continue to believe that people who live in poverty lack sharing a common set of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours. They exhibit poor bell curve mentality of failing work ethics, dwell in the use of alcohol drug abuse or dangerous instruments and show apathy toward university/school programmes like examination.

There is the urge by many schools/universities to enhance their internally generated revenue. This has made the community elders and managers of some Universities in which their facilities are being used to conduct university distance education examinations, to leave open the use of the facilities to whoever can afford to pay as demanded. This has made the religious organizations seeking space for worship centres to compete with the university distance education managers seeking space to conduct examinations. That is to say, most times noise from religious worships and other ceremonies by community members such as matriculation, convocation, elections or weddings tend to interfere with the examinations. Hatch (2009) complained about this development when he asserted in one of his articles that for universities to succeed on a wider scale, school based improvement initiatives (such as the conduct of examinations) have to be accompanied by concerted efforts to create more favourable economic, social, religious and political conditions. The conditions will give all the University programmes a better chance to manage the external environmental influences.

There is a role which community members and universities ought to play in providing incentive structures such as making available enough seats, materials and equipment for practices during examination. Unfortunately, the dirty nature of some environments and losses produced has immensely affected the conduct of the University distance education examinations in some centres. This was why Schleicher (2009) in his research work on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) could track the performance of education systems in 23 industrialized countries of the world. In that research work, it was observed that physical injury of students, theft by community members and the possession of alcohol or drugs were among other problems frequently cited as obstacles to learning and conduct of examinations. The above observations all point to the fact that there is a need to examine the conduct of Nigeria's University distance education examinations and the most pressing community interferences affecting the administration of the examinations in both the science and arts courses. This work will enable the researcher to determine and suggest strategies or an action plan which if implemented would enable Nigeria to reach the goals of the University distance education programmes.

Purpose of the study and research questions

Generally, the study intends to find out negative community members' interference, which hinders to a great extent the successful standard conduct of university distance education examinations in South Eastern Nigeria. Specifically, the study was aimed at articulating measures that could be put in place to improve the conduct of the examination in South Eastern Nigeria and the relationship between the community members and the administrators of university distance education programmes. University distance learning examinations, even though fraught with problems, are done in Nigeria in a number of forms such as pen and paper semester examination type, electronics or Website examination and long Vacation or come into resident examination. This study is not

interested in distinguishing one type of examination from the other but to see how to handle the influence of learning community on the various examinations.

The research questions formulated to guide the investigation are as indicated below:

1. Which are the various forms of community members' interference in the conduct of university distance education examinations in Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of community members' interference in the conduct of University distance education examinations in Nigeria?
3. Which are the operational steps to follow to minimize community members' interference in the conduct of university distance education examinations in Nigeria?

Research design and procedure

Descriptive and analytical survey research designs were used for this research work. 28 universities that are offering distance education programmes in Nigeria and from different parts of the country were considered for the work. The population of the work comprised 480 facilitators out of which 48 were sampled purposively and randomly for this work. The self made instrument which comprised 15 items was used to enable the researcher to obtain data for each of the research questions. The responses of the facilitators were ordered in a four-point likert scale. The instrument was face and content validated and coefficient of reliability determined as 0.88. Z-test statistical technique was adopted in the analysis of the data collected. Any mean score between 1–1.4 is accepted as strongly disagree, then between 1.5–3.4 is accepted as disagree, 2.5–3.4 is accepted as agree and 3.5–4.0 is accepted as strongly agree.

Data analysis and results

Forms of community members' interference in examinations

Table 1 shows that the following forms of community members' interference in the conduct of university distance education examinations in Nigeria were identified by respondents. They include occasional entering of halls by cult members with weapons of intimidation on invigilators; stealing and damaging of some examination materials and pews and dirtying examination venues with wastes, papers and excreta. Other interferences include examination space encroachment for religious worships and other local ceremonies and reluctance to release land and some facilities for examination when the community is not favoured in one way or the other.

All the same, the respondents did not agree that the community members interfere in the conduct of University distance education examination by going for the procurement of question in advance and giving answers to them.

Consequences of community members' interference in examinations

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that the various form of community members' interference in the conduct of University distance education examination in Nigeria has had some consequences. The influences are that it has made the basic level of academic achievement/competences targeted for students to fall low and that students are discouraged by their parents to participate in the University distance education examination in such communities.

Other effects identified are that the administrators of University distance education examinations lose focus and sponsorship, partnership obstacle and opposition challenge by National Universities commission prevails and the valuing of the students taking the examination, the host community and the examination outcome reduces.

Table 1: Forms of community members' interference in the conduct of University distance education examinations in Nigeria

Item	Form of Interferences	Number of Respondents	Total score	Weighted Average score	Remark
1	Occasional entering of halls with weapons of intimidation on invigilators during emergency	48	192	4.00	Strongly agree (4)
2	Stealing and damaging of some examination materials and pews	48	192	4.00	Strongly Agree(4)
3	Dirtying of examination venues with wastes, papers and excreta	48	172	3.58	Strongly Agree (4)
4	Examination space encroachment for religious worships and other local ceremonies	48	166	3.46	Strongly Agree (4)
5	Reluctance to release land and same facilities for examinations where the community is not favoured in one way or the other	48	131	2.73	Agree (3)
6	Procurement of questions in advance and giving answers to them	48	83	1.73	Disagree (2)

Table 2: Consequences of Community interference in conduct of University Distance Education Examination in Nigeria

Item	Consequences	Number of Respondents	Total score	Weighted Average score	Remark
1	Basic level of Academic achievement/competences targeted for students fall low	48	168	3.50	Strongly agree (4)
2	Discouragement of students by parents to participate in the University distance education examinations	48	120	2.50	Agree (3)
3	Administrators of University distance education examination will lose focus and then confidence of their sponsors	48	132	2.75	Agree (3)
4	Partnership obstacle and opposition challenges prevail	48	164	3.42	Agree (3)
5	Valuing of students, the host community and examination outcome reduces	48	151	3.15	Agree (3)

Table 3: Operational steps to follow to minimize community members interference

Item	Operational Steps	Number of Responses	Total score	Weighted Average score	Remark
1	Creating proper climate to arouse social conscience against community interference during examinations	48	192	4.00	Strongly agree (4)
2	Rekindling students' natural curiosity and enthusiasm for real learning and examination by nurturing well their personal and spiritual development	48	192	4.00	Strongly Agree (4)
3	Setting up community based honour society programmes and parades to collaboratively motivate achieving students and celebrate hard work	48	192	4.00	Strongly Agree (4)
4	Ensuring equity and successfully examining every student, no matter the influences of poverty on the students learning and access to writing examination	48	192	4.00	Strongly Agree (4)

Operational steps to minimize community members' interference in examinations

Table 3 shows that the respondents strongly agreed that there are a number of measures which could be put in place to minimize community members interference in the conduct of university distance education examinations in Nigeria. They include creating proper climate to arouse social conscience against community interferences, and rekindling students' natural curiosity and enthusiasm to participate in real learning and examination by nurturing well their personal and spiritual development.

The other steps accepted by the respondents include setting up community-based honour society programmes and parades to collaboratively motivate achieving students and elevate hard work; as well as ensuring equity and successfully examining every student, no matter the effect of poverty on the students learning and access to writing examination.

Discussion of findings

The results of the analysis of the information collected from the respondents and displayed in tables 1, 2 and 3 revealed a series of community members' interference in the conduct of university distance education examinations in Nigeria, the consequences and steps to follow to minimize the effect in the future. Drawing our attention to the positions of the respondents in table 1, it was realized that cult students occasionally enter the examination halls with weapons to intimidate the invigilators. This is in line with Aggarwal's (2008) observation in his works: that students threaten the life of invigilators during examination and even go to the extent of preparing to carry knives, shot guns, daggers and chilli powder in their pockets or in their shoes with an intent to use them in case of emergency.

The study further revealed stealing and damaging of examination materials and pews by some community members as one of the interferences. This was followed by the finding that community

members interfere by dirtying the examination venues with wastes, papers and excreta as a way of expressing their grievances and opposition to the conduct of the examination.

This is supported by Aggarwal (2008), who stated in his work that some community members are seen during examinations preparing the answers for anticipated questions on additional examination materials/scripts stealthily secured from the examination centres. Covey (2009), in a research work where he asked some parents and local business leaders what they wanted from some school programmes, asserted that they wanted programmes which will teach all members to be responsible and observing good hygiene no matter the environment. Motala (2001) even reiterated this by stating that quality education takes place only in an environment that is healthy, safe, protective, gender sensitive and provides adequate resources and facilities.

Encroachment of community members into some examination spaces for religious worship or local ceremonies and the hesitation of community members to release land and some facilities for examination purposes except when it favours them directly or financially, were identified as other interferences by respondents. This was why Price (2008), in line with the above finding, stated that when community groups want to pitch in, we must articulate strategies which will best capitalize on their assets to the schools so that their involvement produces better outcomes for the students as opposed to busy work, distractions and tension for school personnel. He further went on to ask what educators can do to first galvanize and then direct community groups' energy and approval in ways that will complement what is going on in any classroom, which could be in form of University distance education examination.

After reviewing table 2 items, the respondents also identified a number of consequences as a result of community members' interference in the conduct of University distance education examinations. The effects included basic level of academic achievement/competences of the students falling low, and discouragement of students from participating in the examinations by parents or guardians. In support of these findings, Balfanz and Legters (2006) branded such Universities dropout factories. They reported that typically some of the students concerned stop focusing on class lectures and examinations, attend infrequently, fail too many courses to be promoted to the next level of study, try again with no better results, and ultimately drop out.

Some other consequences identified by the respondents included examination administrators losing focus and confidence of sponsors, facing partnership opposition and reducing the examination outcome and host community values. According to MC Wilson as stated by Price (2008) the finding tallies with his observation that in working with community parents, it is important to speak and act in positive forces. That badgering them by the administrators will simply turn them off to the message. And according to AED (2005) as collaborations move into the operational phase, insufficient consultation among partners can cause some organization to lose interest and value. It implies that, when partners are kept out of the loop, the partnership may suffer in various capacities. There must be a spelled out sense of the respective roles of the partners. Problems can arise when the various parties are unclear as to what their roles ought to be to the success of an examination.

In table 3, the respondents outlined creating proper climate to arouse social conscience against community interference during examinations; rekindling students' natural curiosity and enthusiasm for real learning and examination; setting up community-based honour society programmes to motivate and celebrate achieving students; and ensuring equity and successful examination of every student no matter the influence of poverty as steps to take to minimize community interference. This was why Aggarwal (2008) advised the boards of education to create a proper climate against the social evil known as community interference and malpractices in examinations, which has almost

completely vitiated the educational process. De Neal (1998) acknowledged McKnight Achievers society and Urban League in Gary, honouring every youngster who earned a 3.0 GPA and thereby building in the students' self-esteem and motivating all students to want to work harder in their studies. Parrett and Budge (2009) also suggested the provision of protective factors by removing any economic barriers to students participation in various classroom activities and restructuring schools into small learning communities and advisory programmes.

Conclusions and recommendations

Now that it has been established that community members interfere with the conduct of University distance education examination in Nigeria, the administrators of the examination must learn to rebuild and maximize the creation of more favourable relationship between them and the communities. It is by rebuilding the relationship, that the university administration can tackle the difficult tasks faced in conducting the Universities distance education examination.

Administrators of University distance education examinations have enormous responsibility in trying to conduct, motivate and teach their students to learn to collaborate with community groups, which may not be part of their job schedules. But due to the fact that there have been some problems and break ups between the university and their communities in times past, working with the community members is essential if the examinations must achieve the desired objectives.

This work hereby recommends as follows:

1. The universities offering distance education examinations in some communities must develop traditions and sustain them, which will intentionally build relationship between the institutions and community members. Covey (2009) suggested holding events such as leadership honouring day, silver-tray luncheons where students are taught basic manners and other etiquettes, inaugural ball in-house sports, telling of stories and holding of protection services in the community.
2. The University administrations, instead of dominating the action, should supervise and allow community members who are qualified to be key players in conducting the examinations and getting paid the necessary honorarium.
3. The University administrators must initiate certain strategies to attract community funders in helping high performing students who are influenced by poverty. The key to succeeding in these ventures is based on the seriousness of the Universities in partnering with the community groups, the thoughtfulness of the action plan, the potential impact of the action plan, the capacity to execute the action plan, the clearheaded grasp of the plans' execution challenges and the ability to assess impact of the plans' execution on the attitudes and achievement of all the students in the programme.
4. Deployment of enough law enforcement officers to ward off infiltrators during the conduct of examinations. Sanctions should be appropriately given where any community members are interfering in the conduct of examination to discourage other communities from taking similar action
5. University administrators must spend part of the examination budget on thoughtful improvements to examination halls in the communities, libraries, toilet facilities, or other aspects of the physical environment, which conserve both the university neighbourhood and community members.

All efforts by the University administrators to improve conduct of distance education examinations in the communities without regard to maximizing the relationship and opportunities with the

community members are likely to continue to fail. This study is therefore advocating that while our target is to successfully conduct University distance education examinations in Nigeria, concerted efforts ought to be put in place to create more favourable religious, ethnic, economic, social and political conditions in our communities which will enable the examinations to achieve the desired goals.

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